CHAPTER 7
7.1 LANGUAGE AND STYLISTICS

Before concluding this present dissertation, I would like to analyse Deshpande’s unique and spontaneous narrative style and language and show how she uses this spontaneity to present and express the issues. She is concerned with in her novels. Among the other novelists experimenting consciously with the Indian writing in English, Shashi Deshpande has a unique place: “One of the problems I’ve had to face as a writer is the isolation one works in when one writes in English in India—an isolation that is emphasized when one is a woman...for me the problems amounted to this: there was nothing, nobody I could model myself on... I could only tell myself; I don’t want to write like this, not like this, not like this...

Shashi Deshpande, “The Dilemma of the Writer”

By 1996, when A Matter of Time was published in India, Shashi Deshpande had seven novels, four books for children, more than eighty short stories, and a screenplay to her credit, making her one of the most published women writers in English in contemporary India. Her books are available in much of the Western world, either in English or in translation, and she is the recipient of a string of literary awards, including the prestigious national Sahitya Akadei Award in 1990 for her novel That Long Silence.

Yet she remains curiously ‘invisible’ in her own perception, as well as that of the general public. At a time when a writer’s stature seems to be determined by the number of column inches she gets in newspapers and periodicals and the amount of media attention her new work attracts, Deshpande’s presence is low-key. Although her work has been published in English in India and the United Kingdom and has been translated into
German, Russian, Finnish, Dutch, and Danish, she still doesn’t attract the
critical or popular attention that writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee,
or even Ruth Prawer Jhabawala do. This is only partly explained by her
location—distant from media capitals of Bombay and Delhi and her own
modest, almost reclusive, lifestyle. Much more likely an explanation is the fact
that she is almost completely ‘homegrown’, a writer so rooted in her reality
and her social and culture milieu as to feel “alienated” from what she refers to
as the Westernized literary landscape of English writing in India. “I am
different from other Indians who write in English,” She said in an interview
with translator and editor Laxhmi Holstrom in 1993. “My background is very
firmly here. I was never educated abroad, my novels don’t have any
Westerners, for example. They are just about Indian people and the
complexities of our lives... My English is as we use it. I don’t make it easier
for anyone, really.”2 Elaborating on this five years later, she said to me that
“All those writers writing in English then- R.K Narayan, Raja Rao, Nayantara
Sahgal, Kamala Markandeya- were totally alien to my feelings as an Indian
writer... I had no desire to feel any literary kinship with them. “Explaining
what she meant by “alienated”, she went on to say that their world was “not
my world”, that what they created was seen from a certain “angle” that didn’t
allow a sense of intimacy either with the place or people.

“No when I think of it I realize that (this writing) was intended for a
Western readership. So when I started writing I certainly was not using
them as my role models. I had no role models. My path was totally
unliterary, in one sense, because I was not a student of literature, so
writing was never a literary exercise, it was just a means of self-expression.”

Narrative techniques apart, the most obvious challenge for the Indian writer in English is the use of English language in a way that will be distinctively Indian, and yet remain English. Though Indian writing in English has come to stay, the propriety of Indian writers using English is still debated upon. Raja Rao in his ‘preface’ to Kauhapura declares: “We can not write like the English. We should not”. The problem of the Indian English novelist is, indeed, unique. He or she writes in English about people who don’t normally speak or think in English. In order to overcome this problem, novelists have made different experiments with language. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee, these experiments can be classified under three heads, “Experiment in diction (literal translation of idioms), experiments in syntax (changing the structure of sentences) and imagery”.  

Literal translation has been most consciously tried by Mulk Raj Anand who has no inhibitions of taking liberties with the English language in spite of the disapproval of reviewers and critics. Literal translations of Hindi and Panjabi phrases like “Are you talking true talk?” or “to make one’s sleep illegal”, are generously spread across his stories. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her book, The Twice-Born fiction, has made a list of some of the Punjabi and Hindi idioms used by Anand in his works, some of it which may sound atrocious to those not familiar with either of these languages. For example, ‘eating the air’ (to take a stroll), ‘breaking the vessel’ (to expose a secret), and ‘black in the pulse’ (something wrong). Anand’s works are also liberally
sprinkled with swear words and words of abuse, which of course are not out of place in stories mostly about the Punjab peasantry.

Khushwant Singh also translates many Punjabi phrases and proverbs into English. Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novels are full of liberal translations of Bengali proverbs, while Raja Rao’s novels are full of translations of Kannada sayings. R.K Narayan, perhaps, is the only one among the older generation who did not feel the need to use either any Indian translations of words and phrases nor original English textbook phrases. Among the later novelists, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Kamala Markandaya have managed to use the English language without distorting it with unseemly translations of words and phrases or coining of new compound words like ‘that-house-people’ or ‘next-house-woman’s kitchen’. Shashi Deshpande belongs to the new breed of English writers who suffer from no complexes about using English because most of them don’t even consider it a foreign language. According to Meenakshi Mukherjee: “Earlier, English was the language of public discourse, of higher education. It is only for a section of those born in the 1950s and after, that English is the first language, some times their only language. They display a careless intimacy with English, which enables them to play with it.”

Deshpande’s writing is unplanned and quite spontaneous. Replying to Vanamala Vishwanath’s observation that her writing is obviously Indian does not draw attention to itself, Deshpande replies:

No, I don’t believe in making it obviously Indian. But all this is basically because I’m isolated—I’m not part of any movement and not conscious of readers to impress. To get wider recognition here and abroad, you have to be in the university and places like that with the
right contacts. I’m an ordinary woman who writes sitting at home. None of these things are within my reach. This has, I believe, done me good. It has given me great freedom. I’m happy with this anonymity. Once you get publicity-conscious, your writings become affected. I’m truly happy with this freedom.”

Deshpande, however, feels that writing in English in this country is a drawback because it alienates the writer from mainstream. She seems to solve this problem by considering English, not a foreign language, but one of the Indian languages, she says:

“I believe that English writing in this country is a part of our literatures; I consider English as one more of our bhāshas as Ganesh Devy calls them I know them I know that our writing comes out of an involvement with this society, out of our experiences here, over relation ship is now here, and happily our publishers are here as well, yet, I am disturbed by the recent trend in English writing which in its pursuits of role model outside, is alienating itself from its roots”.

She feels that by writing in English she belongs to a small circle like the regional language writers and therefore, does not feel that it makes her non-Indian. In any way she does not categorized as Indian-English She says: “I am an Indian writer. My language just happens to be English, which cannot be called a foreign language at all because it is so much used in India.”

Deshpande also very categorically rejects the use of Indian translations in her works to provide an Indian flavor, which was considered so essential by most of the earlier writers. She says: “I don’t use indianism to make my writing look Indian. I never try to make India look exotic. I don’t think of a
Western audience at all. I belong to Indian literature. I would not like ever to be called an Indo-Anglican writer. I feel strongly about that.9

Shashi Deshpande is aware of the problem faced by the Indian writers in English but feels that writers should work out their own language. She expresses happiness with the present breed of Indian writers in English whose writing seems to be aimed at Indian readers more than Western. She is also happy that the present day writers seem to have got away from the obsessions with East-West conflict, which has little relevance today. Deshpande, however, admits to failure at times to express the right emotion in a language alien to the characters she creates. She says: “I lose the range of nuances which are available in Marathi, for example, the richness of the phrases that make up that language.”10

Deshpande’s mind is ever alert to the issues related to contemporary society, and she has evolved literary skill in a manner, which enables her to present these issues realistically. It is small wonder if the Times Literary supplements showered praises on her creative use of language: “Deshpande eschews linguistic pyrotechnics and formal experimentation, but has sufficient command of her tradition to give the lie to the belief that the English language is incapable of expressing any Indian world other than a cosmopolitan one”.11

Shashi Deshpande came to writing quite late in her life, and she came to it by accident. Thirty years old and in England, where she had accompanied her husband for a year, she was encouraged by him to write about all they had seen and done so that she would not forget it. She began putting her experiences down on paper and sent her articles to her father, who in turn sent them on to the Deccan Herald, a Southern Indian newspaper. Much to her
surprise, they published her pieces and almost without her knowing it, her
writing career had begun. “It was only much later that it struck me how
discontented I had been with my life” she told me. “Not unhappy, just
discontented. Everything changed after I started writing…”

Three factors in her early life shaped Deshpande as a writer: her father,
Adya Rangacharya, was one of the most well known Kannada writers of his
time; she was educated exclusively in English: and she was a woman. 12 Born
in 1938 in Dharwar, a small town in the Southern Indian state of Karnataka,
she grew up surrounded by books and literary personalities. Their house was
redolent with an atmosphere of discussions, of tea time conversation on book
and ideas, a place where play reading and rehearsals took place all the time. “I
was happily submerged in it”, she recalls 13. Although the family could be
defined as a typical middle-class professional and scholarly one, in actuality it
was rather unconventional for the times. Her parents did not belong to the
same region or community. Her mother came from an affluent family in
Maharastra in Western India, and their marriage was most unusual. In a
country where marrying outside your class and community is still frowned
upon, the fact that her parents had an arranged marriage that transgressed there
norms was most remarkable. They didn’t speak the same language.

Like many educated Indians Deshpande is fluent in at least three
languages and comfortable in four or five. Her parents’ “mixed marriage”
meant she spoke both their languages, Kannada and Marathi, she learned
Sanskrit because it was her father’s specialization; and her English language
education ensured that she was exposed to the best that English had to offer.
This trilingualism worked in a most complicated way: as children, Shashi and
her sister spoke to their mother and each other in what was literally their mother tongue, Marathi, and to their father and brother in Kannada. It was when they were much older that all three children adopted English as their language, and it is only now, years later, that Deshpande herself has been able to reconcile her Kannada and Marathi heritage.

Despite the unconventional decision to send their daughters to a missionary school rather than a local school, Deshpande’s parent’s household was by no means a Westernized one, Sanskrit classics and the Kannada greats were as much an influence as Ibsen and Shaw, and, she recalls, “if in school we did Wordsworth and Tennyson, at home we had to learn Amarkosa by heart.” Nevertheless, English prevailed, and it is in English that she thinks and writes. Because she never studied in any of the other languages she speaks, she never used them as “working tools”; to try to write creatively in them, then, would be to presume too much.

The question of the language in which a writer chooses to write in a multilingual culture like India is fraught with contradiction, and it would be impossible to address it in all its complexity within the scope of this afterword. But it lies at the heart of every debate on indigenous versus alien, authentic versus fake, Westernized versus “India”, even traditional versus modern. The much greater visibility of writers writing in English, now a world language with worldwide readership, lends an even sharper edge to the discussion. At the same time, it places the writers themselves in a bittersweet relationship with other writers in their own country.

Consider the ironies: India has twenty-two officially recognized languages each of which has an old and venerable literary and critical
tradition, and a history of sophisticated scholarship and publishing. Colonial rule implemented English language education in the nineteenth century, a fact that has made for an unalterable-albeit poignant-reality: although it is equally foreign to every single Indian, English nevertheless functions as a link-language for all. It is the language of higher education, science and technology, and commerce. Increasingly, it has also become a literary language in its own right, elbowing its way into the literary pantheon in India.

Only two percent of Indians read and write English, but its importance in the cultural life of the country has grown steadily. Its much greater international access and exposure places it in an asymmetrical relationship with all other Indian languages, so that the decision to use it creatively is a much more overtly political act than choosing regional language would be, writers contend with issues of representation, of using the colonizer's language, of cultural baggage, of the translatability of the local and native, and, lastly, with the question of voice.

Especially over the last ten or fifteen years, young Indians writing in English have flashed across the world's literary horizon and, in a way, have intensified the spotlight on these questions. Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Bharati Mukherjee, Githa Hariharan, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Manjula Padmanabhan, Vikram Seth, Anjana Appachana, Allan Sealy, and Shashi Deshpande, among others, have forced literary and commercial establishment to reckon with what is sometimes called Indo-Anglican writing. The fact that these writers have won literary acclaim and have been commercially successful has, in turn, resulted in a somewhat unfortunate and unhappy comparison with writing in other Indian languages. The old question
of who represents whom-and what and how- has become both acrimonious and troubled. None of the writers mentioned (and none of the many others not listed here) has ever admitted to being seriously disadvantaged because he or she writes in English—although Deshpande has said that she “regrets enormously that I was cut off from my own languages and literature”. And most of these writers would concur with Deshpande’s statement “English writing in this country is part of our literature”. The fact that an unmistakable cachet is attached to it goes without saying. The international notice and exposure writers’ gain by publishing in English adds enormously to their visibility and marketability. Being published in; literary magazines like Granta or The NewYork or by literary presses like Faber And Faber, Cape, Bloomsbury, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, or Random House immediately guarantees a readership that runs into tens of thousands, and often has literary agents knocking at their doors. All this is in addition to the obvious financial gains. What also follows, however is that choice of language to some extent determines the subject matter to some extent: most contemporary Indian writing in English is preoccupied with the life and times of the urban middle class and, willy-nilly, the label Westernized manages to stick.

Deshpande is quite clear that, for her, finding her own voice meant not just a woman’s voice but a literary voice of her own: no magic realism, no concessions to “marketability”, no themes or situations that pander to a so-called Western audience, not adapting her style to what a target readership might prefer. One will not find in her novels any element of the “exotic”, a National Geographic-land-and-its-people kind of treatment of the unfamiliar. Rather than serve up a dish that experiments with the spices of the Orient,
Deshpande assumes her readers' familiarity with the everyday ingredients of her offerings, relying upon their fresh, home-cooked flavor to have readers asking for more. Her writing style is marked by absence of flamboyance or literary flourish. Nor does she beguile us with Merchant Ivory-like gloss on "Indian culture". So, she has never, for example, felt any disjunction between her social self and her literary self, of the kind that critics have noted in other Indian women writers writing in English. Part of the reason for this, she thinks, in her small-town origins. Growing up in Dharwar, where she lived until she was fourteen years old, made the difference. "A city shapes you differently," she maintains. "A small town never leaves you." Thus, locale has a very definite function and meaning in all her novels, and although no specific place may be named, its evocation can quit clearly is traced back to her childhood homes. So Saptagiri and the flat in Dadar (Bombay) in That Long Silence, Bangalore in A Matter of Time, and the ancestral villages that figure so prominently in The Dark Holds No Terrors and A Matter Of Time are not just any geographical locations. They are the matrix from which her characters, particularly her female characters, spring, and they form an essential part of "the kind of people they are". And, indeed, the kind of people they are is the kind one would easily find in any medium-sized town in India: "ordinary people, " Deshpande says, "people like you and me going about their daily business". Teachers, lawyers, doctors, an occasional accountant or banker, they are modest and unassuming-far removed from the flash of MTV and designer shoes. In a sense, they are the heart of middle Indian.

It is widely accepted that "The novel is the readiest and most acceptable way of embodying experiences and ideas in the context of our
time”.\(^{17}\) The manner in which to write a good novel, however, remains highly debatable. Many modern critics believe that in the past too much attention was paid to the story or plot overlooking psychological aspects. Some modern novelists have written novels that are experimental and far removed from the traditional story-telling methods. According to Somerset Maugham, these writers who are dubbed anti-novelists, “Consider the telling of a story for its own sake as a debased form of fiction”\(^{18}\).

The principal features of the anti-novelist, according to Paul Verghese, are “lack of an obvious plot; diffused episode; minimal development of character; detailed surface analysis of objects; repetition; experiments with vocabulary, punctuation and syntax, variations of time sequence, alternative ending and beginnings.”\(^{19}\)

The narrative technique employed by the novelist is also gaining importance, considering the gradual increase in the different methods of story telling. Plain narrative or story telling is still the most common method employed by the novelist who is omnipresent and omniscient in this type of writing. The first person narrative is usually employed by the novelist to make his story appear more realistic and more credible. While novels written in such a manner have a ring of authenticity to them, they do not enable the novelist to look deep into the minds and motives of the rest of the characters. Shashi Deshpande overcomes this problem by using a combination of the first person and third person narrative coupled with flashback devices to lend force and realism to the novel. A chronological analysis of Deshpande’s development as a novelist requires a keen study of the narrative technique employed by her, beginning with her first full length novel, *Roots and Shadow.* The novel essentially deals with the protagonist Indu’s painful self-analysis. The author
also tries to encompass several other themes in this slim novel. Apart from the
obvious and central theme of Indu’s relentless probing to discover herself,
there is the theme of bohemianism in the person of Naren in stark contrast to
the middle-class values of Indu’s family. There is the theme of woman’s fate
in general which is brought to the reader’s notice, unobtrusively, in the form
of Indu’s observations. There is also the theme of the old order giving way to
the new—symbolized by the demolition of the old house to construct a hotel.
As Shama Futehally observes: “This slender novel attempts, in way, to
encompass too many themes, and is unable to develop them beyond making
reflections on each which are almost in the nature of asides.” Other critics
like Madhu Singh, however, are highly appreciative of her skill in
interweaving myriad themes into a coherent whole. Comparing Roots and
Shadows with That Long Silence, Madhu Singh points out that the former “Is
the more powerful of the two. In its succinctness lie its strength and the
punch.”

To capture the interest of the reader, Deshpande avoids the simple
technique of straightforward narration, and instead employs the flashback
method. While the first chapter deals with the present, the later chapters move
backwards in time, culminating in the final chapter, which again ends in the
present. This convoluted narration has come in for some criticism by
reviewers who feel that it has only contributed to creating confusion in the
minds of readers. For instance, Shama Futehally comments: “This is a device
which is useful either when some element of suspense is needed, or for a novel
with a non-narrative structure. For this novel chronological clarity is essential,
as the reader already has to cope with an abundance of characters and their
complex interactions. The first chapter, where we are faced with all of them simultaneously, and without introduction, is rather confusing.” The entire novel is written in the first person, the narrator being a young woman writer who returns to her childhood home and finds herself caught in the whirlpool of family intrigues. Seen through the eyes of a young woman with liberated and progressive ideas, ordinary everyday incidents acquire a new meaning and highlight the gross inequalities in society. The first person narration also allows the author to probe deep into the mind of the protagonist, exposing her fears and frustrations with admirable candour, inviting the praise of reviewers like C.W Wastson, who compares Deshpande to the master story teller, Chekhov:

“Other South Indian writers have been compared to Chekhov, but Shashi Deshpande, in this novel at least, comes closest to that writer, and the tragi- comedy of The Cherry Orchard is constantly recalled in the description of the crumbling house and the squabbling of the family. The writing is beautifully controlled and avoids the temptation of sentimentality, which the subject might suggest and again the control is reminiscent of Chekhov.”

The Dark Holds No Terrors is commendable for its honest portrayal of the psychological problems faced by the protagonist, Sarita, a career woman, achieves a rare level of authenticity because of the use of a double perspective-the shifting of the narrative from the first person to the third person in every alternate chapter. When asked by Lakshmi Holmstrom in an interview as to how she had hit upon this technique, Deshpande replied:
The present is in the third person and the past is in the first person. I was doing it throughout in first person stories. But that’s often a perspective I use in my short stories. I wanted to be more objective. So then I tried it in the third. But it wouldn’t work at all. Yet I really needed to distance myself from the narrative in the present, otherwise it was going to be far too intense. And then I read an American novel by Lisa Alther where she uses this method. And the minute I came across her novel thought-let me admit it freely- Oh god, this is how I am going to do my novel"\textsuperscript{23}.

This is how the novelist manages to tell the story objectively, and at the same time, “No summary will do justice to the intricate web the author has woven through the superimposition of the past over the present, through dreams, nightmares, flashback, introspection and simple straightforward third person narration”\textsuperscript{24}.

The Sahitya Akademi Award winning \textit{That Long Silence} is a complex novel of despair and triumph, of suppression and freedom, all played out for the better part in the heroine’s mind through memories and recollections? The narrative with its slow unknotted of memories and unravelling of the soul reads like an interior monologue quite similar to the stream of consciousness technique employed by the likes of Virginia Woolf. A particularly bad patch in the narrator’s life makes her bring alive her past through ruminations. Prema Nanda kumar, however, maintains that the novel “is not a forbidding stream of consciousness probe in the Virginia woolf tradition. It is very much a conventional tale full of social realism evoked by links of memory. Not misty recollection but clear-eyed story telling”\textsuperscript{25}. The narrator achieves a kind
of catharsis by an objective analysis of what went wrong with her marriage and why she had failed as a writer. According to the reviewer Rita Joshi: “The method is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett in plays such as That Time where the character sits centre stage while three voices go over his past”26. The technique is, perhaps, best described by the narrator Jaya herself, who is telling her own story: “All this I’ve written—it’s like one of those multicolored patchwork quilts the Kakis made for any new baby in the family. So many bits and pieces— a crazy conglomerate of sizes, shapes and colours put together”27.

The intense interiority of her early novels The Dark Holds No Terrors and That Long Silence—and her use of the first person for female protagonists weave a web of intimacy around the reader, an effect that is enhanced by her near total focus on the domestic—the almost mundane. “I was born,” says Jaya in That Long Silence. “My father died when I was fifteen. I got married to Mohan. I have two children and I did not let a third live. Maybe this is enough to start off with”. This is an almost eerie echo of her creator’s sentiments, and indeed Jaya is the character who Deshpande feels corresponds most closely to herself “A lifetime of introspection went into this novel,” Deshpande writes, “The most autobiographical of all my writing, not in the personal details, but in the thinking and ideas”. Later in the novel, Jaya comments directly on the writing process:

Perhaps it is wrong to write from the inside. Perhaps what I have to do is see myself, us, from a distance. This has happened to me before; there have been times when I’ve had this queer sensation of being detached and distant
from my own self. Times when I’ve been able to separate two distinct strands, my experience and my awareness of that experience.

This twinning of “myself” with “us”, of being “inside” with “being detached and distant from my own self,” this alternative of the first person with the third, simultaneously allows Deshpande never to leave the homeground on which she is most comfortable, and creates the double perspective that is a characteristic of all her novels.

*The Binding Vine* differs in its mode of narration from her earlier novels. The narrative structure in *Roots and Shadow*, *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence* does not progress chronologically, but instead moves back and forth thematically, gradually relating one incident after the other until the entire story is revealed. In *The Binding Vine*, however, individual plots of three different stories are interwoven bringing together three women separated by age, status and education. Urmì narrates the entire story in the first person. To offer deep and intimate glimpses into the life of the narrator’s mother-in-law, Mira, Deshpande uses the poetry and writing in her diary and notebooks. Urmì is able to brilliantly recreate the story of Mira—her unspoken anguish and outrage at being subjected to rape within marriage.

*Small Remedies*, Deshpasnde’s most latest novel, works at different levels—the personal, the worldly, women’s rights, communal violence, motherhood etc. it vacillates between the present and the past, delving into the lives of Savitribasi. Leela, Munni, and the narrator Madhu herself. It is structured as a biography within a biography, with the writer, Madhu, often in a dilemma about how to tell her story. She wonders if a biography is an exercise in truth telling, and if it is, whose version must it be?
In all her novels, Deshpande seeks to faithfully reflect life as it almost is without resorting to any personal commentary and explanation. Her novels, dealing as they do with women’s oppression, are highly susceptible to feminist harangue. But, it is a rare achievement that she has not fallen a prey to this temptation. Unlike Mulk Raj Anand, who takes pleasure in being called a propagandist, Deshpande protests against her work being labelled ‘propaganda.’ She vehemently denies any attempt on her part to moralise as is evident from what she says in an interview to Sue Dickman: “somebody once asked me if I have a social purpose in my writing and I very loudly said ‘No’, I have no social purpose. I write because it comes to me.”

In another interview to Stanley Carvalho, she once again emphatically states: “I hate to write propagandist literature. I think good literature and propaganda do not go together. Any literature written with some viewpoint of proving something rarely turns out to be good literature. Literature comes very spontaneously and when I write I am concerned with people.” She takes pains to explain that her writing merely mirrors the world. She finds that a lot of men are unsympathetic to her writing while a lot of women are sympathetic. The reason for this, according to her, is not difficult to analyse because in her writing, “women see a mirror image and men see, perhaps, a deformed image of themselves.”

But, as she matured as a writer, Shashi Deshpande has undergone a change of outlook regarding the scope of committed writing in literature. This is made clear when she candidly admits:

There was a time when I was scornful of what is called committed writing. I considered such writing flawed because its being message-oriented
diminishes its artistic worth. But now I know that all good writing is socially committed writing, it comes out of a concern for the human predicament. I believe, as Camus says, that the greatness of an artist is measured by the balance the writer maintains between the values of creation and the values of humanity.

It must be observed that Deshpande makes a sparing use of irony, satire or even humour that are the ingredients of great works of art. Flashes of irony are evident in one or two incidents in a couple of novels but they do not seem to be included intentionally by the writer. The most obvious example which comes to mind is the scene in *That Long Silence* where Mohan, Jaya’s husband, accuses her of avoiding him during the crucial period when they are in hiding because of the fear of corruption charges being levelled at him. It is during this period that Jaya herself is facing a traumatic time and needs support. Her husband’s accusation, therefore, seems highly ironical and throws her off balance for sometime. She keeps telling herself:

I must not laugh, I must not laugh... even in the midst of my rising hysteria, a warning bell sounded loud and clear. I had to control myself, I had to cork in this laughter. But it was too late. I could not hold it any longer. Laughter burst out of me, spilled over, and Mohan stared at me in horror as rocked helplessly. (122).

She is able to regain her sanity only after decides to break her silence and record her story.

Another example of Deshpandes attempt at irony is her creation of the character, Priti, in *The Binding Vine*. Priti who at best can be called a psuedo-feminist provides a foil to the ever-serious Urm. Urm’s compassion for her
long dead mother-in-law, Mira, makes her want to set Mira’s random writings to order and publish them. But Priti is more interested in the sensation which Mira’s story is likely to create and plans to adapt her life into a film. Her reaction to Kalpana’s tragedy also borders on hypocrisy because she is more concerned about the publicity, which the case is sure to generate. The reviewer Shreya Cheravuri, however, feels that Deshpande’s novels could do without such devices because, as she says, “Deshpande’s style is essentially too straightforward for satire and thus in parts, the book lacks a certain elegance”.

Deshpande also, by her own admission, steers clear of sentiment and romance. Speaking at a similar, she expresses her annoyance at not being taken seriously by publishers. One publisher happened to reject her story and advised her to send it to a woman’s magazine instead. This irked her and she began to wonder: “why did the editor say that? It was a good story. I knew that. I was pretty confident about it. It was not a sentimental, romantic love story either, the kind that would fit smugly into a woman’s magazine.”

Deshpande probably feels that romance, sentimentality, and other such features merely diminish the serious concerns of a novel.

The use of myth is also recognized as an important literary device to enhance the artistic effect of the novel. While English poets and writers have relied heavily on Christian, Pagan and classical myths, Indian writers in English have derived inspiration from the wealth of material available in the form of stories from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas and also local legends and folklore. The most often used symbol from Indian mythology, of course, is Sita, who is considered to be the ideal woman-patient
and submissive. Indian writers in English and other languages also draw many other parallels liberally from Indian mythology.

In *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Deshpande draws a parallel from the Dhruva story to highlight the sense of neglect experienced by Saru, whose parents show a blatant preference for her brother, Dhruva. Saru's father also tells her how on her death bed her mother had made him repeat the episode of Duryodhana's hiding in the lake at the end of the battle, waiting for the Pandavas to come and kill him. Saru identifies herself and her mother as Duryodhana figures—both lonely, unloved, defeated and filled with a sense of rejection.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya recollects the fable of the foolish crow and the wise sparrow, which she had often heard as a child. She does not repeat the story to her children because of the fear that they might store it in their subconscious and eventually turn out be like "that damnably, insufferably, priggish sparrow looking after their homes, their babies...and to hell with the world. Stay at home, look after your babies, keep out the rest of the world, and you're safe"(17) Deshpande hints at the way in which the seemingly harmless bedtime stories influence children at a tender age to believe that a woman's job at all times is to protect her family even if she has resort to treachery or deceit.

In *That Long Silence*, Jaya also recalls the *pativrata*- Sita, Savitri and Draupadi- mythical symbols of ideal wifehood, ironically comparing herself to them. "Sita following her husband into exile, Savitri dogging death to reclaim her husband, Draupadi stoically sharing her husband's travails". She feels that she has unconsciously emulated their example by following her husband into
hiding when he is faced with the threat of corruption charges. There are quite a few mythical allusions in Deshpande's novels but she does not believe that myth is used as a literary device. In reply to Lakshmi Holmstrom's question if myth is a kind of language she uses, Deshpande says: "I think so. I think a number of us do that in India all the time; we relate a great deal of our personal lives, our daily lives, to the myths we find parallels as a matter of course. And we do this with all the myths, any myth that seems appropriate, whether they were originally about men or women. In that sense it is a part of a language, a grammar that one knows and understands, rather than a conscious literary device".
7.2 SHASHI DESHPANDE AND THE TRADITION OF THE INDIAN NOVEL

The preceding chapters have attempted a thematic study of Deshpande’s novels, with a special emphasis on the evolutionary characteristics of the female protagonist. After analyzing the inner struggles of the different central characters, we traced the various solutions and compromises arrived at by these women, with a slow but steady movement towards a positivism. Deshpande is gifted with an unborn literary bent of mind, which matured with her experiences in life. Even her graduation in Economics and Law did not seem to have much impact on her writing that came to her very naturally. Though she is the daughter of Sriranga, the famous Kannada playwright, who is known as the Bernard Shaw of Kannada theatre, yet she never got any guidance from him in this field. She repents the fact of being detached from her father. In the response to a question of Vanamala Viswanathan, she says: “If I should criticize him, I should say he was somewhat detached from us...never guided us. May be if he had directed us at an early age. I could have done better. He never did that”. 34

Deshpande writes not for publicity, but to mirror the society as she observes it. She is least bothered about name and fame. That is the reason why in spite of the fact that she had been writing for quite a long period, she still was unknown to many until her last novel That Long Silence got published by the Virgo Feminist Press, London: “It’s meaningless that people know me as a person and not know what I’ve written. I feel publicity is not a good thing for a writer. It detracts from your work. You become interested in yourself as a person than as a writer. I’d rather be known for my books than for
myself\textsuperscript{35} Her contribution to the world of literature is the presentation of the reality of the middle-class woman: "I realize that I write what I write because. I have to. Because it is within me. It's one point of view, a world from within the woman, and that is my contribution to Indian writing."\textsuperscript{36}

Though Deshpande writes for women, presents their problems, lets the world know the problems that women of today are facing, yet she cannot be categorized among feminist writers, close study of Shashi Deshpande's novels reveals her enormous sympathy for women and their travails, provoking reviewers to assume that she has joined the band of feminist writers who have achieved much popularity in the West. She, however, does not approve of being labelled a feminist writer. Though Deshpande refuses to be called a feminist writer, her novels are susceptible to a feminist approach. She "makes it clear that hers is not the strident and militant kind of feminism which sees the male as the cause of all troubles."\textsuperscript{37} Rather her writing deals with the inner mind of the women. She has a remarkable insight into the working of a woman's mind. As a writer, she highlights the secondary position occupied by women and their degradation, which is inevitable in an oppressively male-dominated society. She gives us a peep into the state and condition of the present day woman who is intelligent and articulate, aware of her capabilities, but thwarted under the weight of male chauvinism.

Deshpande's women are the products of a painful period of transition in society where they have a greater share of responsibilities than their predecessors. They also have a number of avenues open before them and, in many fields, they have also proved themselves better than their male counterparts. In spite of their remarkable achievements, the general attitude
towards women has not changed correspondingly. In the institution of marriage, the age-old rules with regard to the accepted behaviour of husband and wife remains almost unchanged, despite an overt display of Western influence.

Shashi Deshpande’s novels are concerned with a woman’s search for her identity—an exploration into the female psyche. Her protagonists undergo an arduous journey to discover themselves and this leads them through a maze of self-doubts and fears. In her novels, she depicts to a woman in myriad roles—wife, mother, daughter and an individual in her own right.

In all Deshpande’s novels, except *Come Up and Be Dead*, the protagonists are married women. Hence her depiction of woman as wife requires special mention. According to Rani Dharkar. “The importance that our society attaches to marriage is reflected in our literature. It is the central concern of Deshpande whose heroines; caught in the quagmire of marriage, struggle to come up for air.” 38 Marriage is, perhaps, the most complex of human relationships. It is defined, as a “cultural phenomenon, which sanctions a more or less permanent union between partners conferring legitimacy on their offspring.” 39 Marriage is not simply a social institution. It is inextricably linked to religion, and religion, being a potent force in our country, determines more or less the code of conduct in marital relationships. Almost all the religions of the world give sanction to female subjugation by the male members of society, thereby perpetuating the myth of female servitude. The Bible categorically tells the woman:

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord.” 40
The ancient Hindu law-giver, Manu, whose philosophy occupies a prominent place in the mainstream of Hindu ideology and culture, proclaims: “Even though the husband be of bad character and seeks pleasure elsewhere he must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.” Thus, it is clear that since time immemorial woman has been given an inferior position in society. It is also obvious that woman has been defined most exclusively in her role as wife. Susan Wadby substantiates this view by who, in her essay, “Women and the Hindu Tradition,” says: “The dominant norms for the Hindu woman concern her role as wife. Classical Hindu laws focus almost exclusively on this aspect of the women. Role models and norms for mothers, daughters, sisters etc., are less prominent and are more apt to appear in folklore and vernacular tradition.”

Shashi Deshpande succinctly presents the inequalities and injustices heaped on woman because of her subordinate status. In *Roots and Shadows*, through the eyes of Indu, the protagonist, we are made aware of the plight of various women like her Kakis and Atyas. The heart-rending account of Akka’s child marriage reveals the appalling condition of women barely a couple of generations ago. The inferior position of a wife in any marriage is made obvious through glimpses into the marriages of Indu’s numerous aunts and uncles. It is clear that Indu, who is proud of her liberated outlook, falls a prey to age-old tradition and unreasonable convention. Deshpande also exposes the sham and hypocrisy prevalent in the so-called urban, educated men like Jayant who are ostensibly influenced by the West and who pretend to possess progressive ideas, but are, in reality, as chauvinistic and fettered to time-worn conventions as their less educated and exposed counterparts. He belongs to a
society, which prides itself on its sophistication and refinement, but at home he remains a conventional husband expecting his wife to play a very submissive role.

Saru’s husband, Manohar, in *That Long Silence*, is a glaring example of men with fragile egos, who find it difficult to accept the superior status of their wives in society. Deshpande also holds society responsible for the disastrous condition of Saru’s marriage. The cruel remarks of his colleague’s wife and those of the girl who interviews Saru further humiliate Manu, who already suffers from an inferiority complex.

Mohan, Jaya’s husband in *That Long Silence*, is a typical Indian husband who takes his wife’s unflinching support for granted. When threatened with charges of corruption, he expects his wife to follow him into hiding without a murmur of protest. He does not mind using his wife, as a crutch in his hour of crisis and the slightest hint of deviation from her role of a subservient wife is enough to provoke a terrifying outburst with which he walks out of the home. Deshpande also shows how Jaya herself is to be blamed for the state of her marriage. In retrospection, Jaya realizes how she had all along followed her Vanita mami’s advice that a husband is like a ‘sheltering tree’, which must be kept alive at any cost because without the tree the wife becomes dangerously unprotected and vulnerable. Jaya thinks that she has “To keep the tree alive and flourishing even if you have to water it with deceit and lies.”

In *The Binding Vine*, Deshpande makes a bold attempt to tackle the subject of marital rape. Through the character of Mira, she focuses attention on all those women who are doomed to silently suffer highly assaults by their
husbands because the very idea of a woman protesting against her husband’s sexual advances is unheard of in our society. Deshpande also hints at the lack of compatibility in Urmī’s marriage even though hers is a love marriage. Through the character of Shakutai, Deshpande shows how at the lower level of society, men flout marital vows most casually like Shakutai’s husband. He is a good-for-nothing drunkard who leaves his wife and three children to fend for themselves and hankers after another woman.

The monogamous nature of women is hinted at in almost all the works of Deshpande. In most of her stories, the protagonist shares a greater level of compatibility with a man other than her husband. This compatibility often leads towards crossing of the boundary of platonic friendship and progresses towards physical attraction, but Deshpande’s women do not overstep the limits of propriety except in the case of Indu in Roots and Shadows who resorts to an extra-marital relationship with Naren in an attempt to assert herself.

In The Dark Holds No Terrors, Saru meets her former classmate Padmakar Rao and the renewal of their friendship seems to border on an affair. Padmakar Rao who reveals dissatisfaction with his wife tries to lure Saru into a relationship. Vulnerable though she is, with the horrifying nocturnal attacks by her husband, Saru refuses to accept the advances made by him. She is however not averse to being flaunted around by Boozie who, she is aware, is using her as a cover to his homosexuality.

In That Long Silence, Jaya finds a perfect match in Kamat, a widower who lives in a flat above hers. He is well read, and apparently he is a good critic. So he is able to offer her constructive criticism with regard to her writing. She is perfectly at ease in his company and confines all her problems
in him. She is never made to suffer any condescension in his company and this sets him apart from all the other men she has known in her life. In course of time, their friendship progresses towards physical attraction, but Jaya controls herself ruthlessly suppresses her desire, in spite of the ample opportunity provided in the seclusion of his apartment. Safeguarding her marriage is of such paramount interest to Jaya that on finding Kamat dead in his flat one day, she prefers to remain silent for the fear of getting involved in a scandal, thereby jeopardizing her marriage.

Similarly, Urmi’s association with Dr. Bhasker in The Binding Vine develops into more than a platonic relationship. Urmi, whose husband is a naval officer and away for many months in a year, yearns at times for physical gratification. Dr. Bhaskar’s self-admitted interest in her and her own attraction towards him offer her an opportunity to indulge in a physical union. But she refuses to let herself be enticed into an extra-marital affair.

Another recurrent relationship in Deshpande’s novels is that between a mother and a daughter. Love and devotion to the mother is an integral part of the Indian psyche. Mythologies and literatures down the ages have always glorified the mother figure. Much has also been written about a mother’s selfless love for her children. But the preference for a son is as old as Indian society itself. A wife’s worth shoots up if she gives birth to a boy. Vedic verses pray that more sons, never daughters, should follow sons. For example, a prayer in the Atharvaveda reads:

The birth of a girl it elsewhere grant, here grant a son. (150)

There are, of course, economic and religious reasons behind such an attitude.

The presence of a son is absolutely necessary to perform many rituals, the
most important ones being those that are carried out upon the death of the parents and which are considered imperative for the well-being of their souls. The daughter, therefore, has not only negligible ritual significance but is also considered an enormous financial burden in as much as she does not contribute to the family income and instead takes away a considerable part of her family fortune as dowry.

But despite the yearning of all mothers to have sons, a mother’s love for her daughter cannot be denied. Sudhir Kakar in an article on “Feminine Identity in India” says “the special maternal affection reserved for daughters, contrary to expectations deprived from social and cultural prescriptions, is partly to be explained by the fact that mother’s unconscious identification with her daughter is normally stronger than with her son.” Shashi Deshpande’s protagonists, however, never seem to be on cordial terms with their mothers. In Roots and Shadows, Indu’s mother dies in childbirth and so there is no delineation of the mother-daughter relationship. In The Dark Holds No Terrors, however, this relationship has a significant place. The entire novel, in fact, revolves around Saru’s relationship with her mother. It is Saru’s antagonism towards her mother and her rejection of the age-old traditional values represented by her that drive Saru into the arms of Manohar. During the crucial years of puberty, Saru develops an aversion to all traditional practice because of her mother’s cold and indifferent attitude. She studies medicine to displease her mother and later marries out of caste to defy her. Even on her death-bed, Saru’s mother has only curses for her daughter. Saru’s, in turn, does not record any warm feelings of her daughter in her recollections, though
she makes sure to provide her daughter with all the material comforts and luxuries that she herself had been denied.

In *That Long Silence*, though there is no overt display of hostility between Jaya and her mother, it is evident that they do not share the same level of cordiality as Jaya and her father. Like Saru, Jaya too agrees to marry Mohan at the slightest hints of disapproval from her mother, and like her again she does not seem to have any strong maternal feelings towards her daughter. In a couple of instances, however, Jaya displays a stronger attachment towards her son. This provokes Subhas K. Jha to comment, “being intellectually equipped to scrutinize male prejudice, she (Jaya) still reveals an unmistakable partiality towards her son. The daughter is a mere blur in the narration, while the son (the heir apparent, the procreator) is described in glowing terms”.

In *The Binding Vine* too, it is obvious that there is no compatibility between the sophisticated Inni and her daughter, Urmii, the protagonist. At one point, in a choked and guilt-laden voice, Inni bursts out that Urmii had been sent to Ranidurg as a child to be brought up by her grandparents, because Urmii’s father did not approve of the way his wife was bringing up the child. Shakutai also shares a love-hate relationship with her daughter, Kalpana. She keeps vacillating between praising her daughter and blaming her for the catastrophe.

These illustrations reveal that the relationship between mother and daughter in Deshpande’s fiction is far from being warm-hearted. Adele King rightly comments: “In all Deshpande’s works there is no mother who could serve as model for the daughter.” In an interview to Vanamala Vishwanath,
Deshpande admits that she does not believe in painting a rosy picture of motherhood. She says:

“It is necessary for women to live within relationships. But if the rules are rigidly laid that as a wife or mother you do this and no further, then one becomes unhappy. This is what I have tried to convey in my writing what I don’t agree with is the idealization of motherhood- the false and sentimental notes that accompany it.”

Deshpande, therefore, rejects the stereotyped image of mother and refuses to use any mawkishly sentiment language to describe the mother-child relationship.

A study of Deshpande’s novels from a feminist viewpoint also reveals the essential loneliness of the heroines bordering on alienation, reminding us of the plight of the protagonists of Anita Desai. In *Dark Holds No Terrors* where Saru as a child grows up almost resenting her mother, while her father remains a shadowy figure in the background. The man she falls in love with and marries, eventually turns out to be a psychological wreck with whom she cannot have a meaningful relationship. Her guru, Boozie, turns out to be a homosexual who had been merely using her as a pawn to hide sexual preferences. Padmakar has his own selfish reasons for waiting to develop a more intimate relationship with her. He likes to meet her because he finds no companionship in his wife who cannot think beyond mundane needs of everyday life. In her disillusionment, Saru thinks, “Love...how she scorned the word now. There was no such thing between man and woman. There was only a need which both fought against futilely, the very futility turning into the thing they called love.” Saru’s own children are described as quite...
indifferent to mother, and Saru herself does not indulge in any sentimental feelings towards them. Social visits to their friend’s homes are described as routine and uninteresting and friends, both Saru and Manu’s, provide no comfort either. At times the novel reads like an existentialist tract devoid of any sentiments and underlining the loneliness of man.

In *That Long Silence* too, Jaya stands alone in her hour of crisis. It is evident that after seventeen years of marriage, Jaya’s relationship with Mohan goes no deeper than physical attachment. Her relationship with the other members of her family remain superficial and she seems to derive no satisfaction even from her children. The only person who offers her satisfying companionship and who animates her dies abruptly, leaving a void in her life. Even the physical attraction she initially feels for her husband gradually dwindles into routine and mechanical affairs, making her feel that “love is a myth without which sex with the same person for a lifetime would be unbearable” (97).

In Deshpande’s sixth novel, *A Matter of Time*, the theme of alienation is even more pronounced. The author quotes extensively from the *Upanishads* to explain the sense of rootlessness and desolation experienced by the protagonist, Gopal, who abandons his wife and three teenaged daughters for some strange and inexplicable reason. The author also describes the pain and humiliation of Sumi, his wife, who copes with the situation admirably and tries to provide emotional and financial security for her three daughters.

Deshpande’s novel, *Small Remedies*, is “a book about writing a book” with reflections on the impossibility of ever capturing in words the truth about any life. It examines, in retrieving memory, the complexities in encapsulating
the life of Savitribai Indorker, who is devoted to music. Running through the
narrative of this remarkable woman is the saga of Leela, who defies
conventional norms and remarries after her widowhood. It is through Madhu’s
eyes that we get to know the dark corners of Bai’s life and the illuminating
saga of Leela. In portraying the struggles of these women for identity, no overt
postures of feminism are struck.

Shashi Deshpande’s frank and uninhibited discussion on a wide range
of topics concerning women has prompted several reviewers to categorize her
as a feminist. A close study of her work also reveals that she is a highly
sensitive writer who is clearly aware of the male-female imbalance in society.
Her male characters conform to the standard feminist description of a middle-
class husband who is insensitive, egoistic and sometimes over-ambitious. But,
at the same time, most of her women characters too suffer from some
weakness or other so much so that it becomes difficult to label her work.

The term feminism itself demands a broader definition. In a generic
way it has come to mean a movement to support the demand for equal social,
political and economic rights with men. Feminism connotes not only an
awareness of women’s plight but also a determination to change the situation.
The treatise ‘Half the Sky’ aptly defines feminism as “The awareness of the
women’s position in society as one of disadvantages or inequality compared
with that of men and also a desire to remove those disadvantages”69. One
wonders whether Deshpande as a novelist fulfills these two requirements so as
to be termed a feminist writer. We may not be sure of her strong desire to
remove the disadvantages of women in society, but even a casual reading of
her novels and short stories convinces us that they abound in her acute
awareness of women’s disadvantages and unequal position in society. In a recently published article, she writes:

Most of my writing comes out of my own intense and long suppressed feelings about what it is to be a woman in our society, it comes out of the experience of the difficulty of playing roles enjoined on me by society, it comes out of the knowledge that I am something more and something different from the sum total of these roles. My writing comes out of my consciousness of the conflict between my idea of myself as a human being and the idea that society has of me as a woman. All this makes my writing very clearly woman’s writing.

Deshpande’s novels bear out and even demonstrate what she holds in theory. *Roots And Shadows* is mainly concerned with women who are given a raw deal. Beginning with the protagonist Indu, the novel is replete with the private agonies of several women covering a wide cross section—educated women, illiterate women, widows, child-brides, domestic servants—all of whom have some genuine grouse or other. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is a typical example of a husband’s inability to come to terms with his wife’s superior social and economic status. Deshpande gives a vivid portrayal of a woman who falls a prey to her husband’s frustrations when he realizes that she has overtaken him professionally. The novel also traces the traumatic childhood of Saru who is the victim of gender bias at the hands of an insensitive mother.

*That Long Silence* is an autobiographical account of Jaya, a gifted writer, whose talent lies smothered under the disapproval of her husband. Jaya seeks to erase the long silence by giving an honest and frank account of the
conditions, which lead to her failure as a writer and the constraints of society, which result in the suppression of her self as an individual.

*The Binding Vine* is a tragic tale of rape sanctioned by marriage in the case of Mira and the brutal rape of Kalpana. It reveals the trauma involved in a rape whether committed within or outside the precincts of marriage. The novel, in a subtle way, also traces the martyrdom of women like Inni, Vanaa and Shakutai.

Thus, the novels of Shashi Deshpande clearly reveal the author’s perception of the endemic imbalance between the sexes. It is, however, obvious that the author stops short of trying to correct this imbalance. The numerous minor characters in the novels suffer in silence or accept their fate with resignation but do not take any step, which might jeopardize their marriage or reputation in society. It is however important to note that each of her novels ends on a note of determination by its protagonist who resolves to take the reins of her life into her hands. Indu in *Roots and Shadows* emerges in greater control over herself at the end of the novel. She puts Akka’s money to use according to the dictates of her conscience and does not bow to pressure from any quarter. She also give up the job, where she had earlier worked only to avoid displeasing her husband, and settles down to pursue her writing, something which she had always wanted to do. With her new found sense of liberation also comes the realization that any freedom she devises must be within the boundaries of her obligations and responsibilities. She is able to appreciate what Naren’s father says about rules adding grace and dignity to life.
Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terrors* is finally liberated and she is no longer afraid of the dark. Kamini Dinesh’s observation aptly sums up Saru’s development as an individual in her own right, “To be true to herself, the woman has to exorcise the film of superimposed attitudes and roles. Her emancipation is not in repudiating the claims of her family, but in drawing upon the untapped inner reserves of strength.” At the end of the novel, Saru stands poised to receive her husband secure in her new found confidence in herself. She successfully rids herself of her complexes and guilts and comprehends the meaning of human life where she realizes that she is not the only one facing the predicament of loneliness: “Alright, so I’m alone. But so’s every one else. Human beings… they’re going to fail you. But because there are just us, because there’s no one else, we have to go on trying. If we can’t believe in ourselves, we’re sunk”. (220)

*That Long Silence* too ends on a note of hope, with the protagonist Jaya’s realization that she is no less to be blamed for allowing her to be dictated by her husband and by the conventions of society. She achieves a kind of catharsis by penning her story and she is able to view the situation more objectively. She says: “I’m Mohan’s wife I thought, and cut off bits of me that had refused to be Mohan’s wife. Now I know that kind of a fragmentation is not possible.” (191). This awareness helps her to cast aside the role she had willingly played all her life.

*The Binding Vine* is, perhaps, the only novel where the heroine, Urmi, is less wrapped in her own discontentment and, despite her recent bereavement, or because of it, gets involved in the misfortunes of others. She shows a positive attitude towards the victims around her. She resolves to get
Mira's poems published and is determined to draw society's attention to the predicament of the rape victim, Kalpana. Indira Nityanandam observes that "The step forward achieved in this novel, is the introduction of female bonding, the desire of one woman to help another less fortunate one". Comparing _The Binding Vine_ with Deshpande's earlier novels, Nityanandam comments: " _The Binding Vine_ is a refreshing change from first three novels of Shashi Deshpande. Protest comes easily to her protagonist here and there is less agony in attempting to change societal roles and attitudes".

What, however, we have to bear in mind is that Shashi Deshpande does not take the radical view of the early Western feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer and Kate Millett. The opinion of most of these Feminists with regard to marriage remains more or less the same. In her famous book, _The Second Sex_, de Beauvoir writes: "It has been said that marriage diminishes man, which is often true, but almost always it annihilates woman". Germain Greer suggests, "If independence is a necessary concomitant of freedom, woman must not marry." Kate Millett feels that marriage reduces the status of woman to a mere object for decoration and a tool to be used for man's sexual gratification. Deshpande's protagonists are, no doubt, victims of this unequal power structure in marriage, but in all her novels she shows how one can rise above such injustice and lead a meaningful existence. In the end, her protagonists almost always strive to make their marriages work. As J. Bhavani observes: "This is not a negative but a realistic end to the novels. Deshpande upholds marriage as the backbone of society, what is stifling is the persona of the wife and not the institution of marriage."
We may say that Deshpande’s views coincide with modern feminist thought which has changed much since the radical feminism of the 1960s. In her book, *The Feminist Mystique*, which took American society by storm, Betty Friedan challenged the universal belief that a woman should find contentment in motherhood and domesticity. Two decades later, Betty Friedan in her book, *The Second Stage*, says that humanity can survive only if women make certain compromises. She suggests that women should pursue some meaningful activity within marriage in order to find happiness and contentment in their lives.

But it is obvious that Deshpande never intends to subscribe to the views of any feminist. Her characters, though urban and educated, are firmly rooted in India with the weight of centuries of tradition and culture behind them. In his essay, “problematising Feminism”, Jaidev says: “It is very necessary for us to have feminism in this country but then this feminism has to be authentic, rooted and context-bound. One does not mind if our feminists are not too clever or good at quoting western critics or weaving intricate post-structuralist cobwebs.”

Deshpande may not be a formal feminist in the strict sense of the word, but it must also be observed that feminism can mean different things to different people. Arshia Sattar in her thought-provoking article on the position of the feminist movement at present observes:

“Feminism is no longer a single voice that speaks for all women irrespective of creed and colour. It is, rather, a ‘rainbow coalition’ of rights, desires, agendas, struggles, victories. Not all issues apply to all
women, our battles need not be the same and, more and more, we tend to speak for ourselves rather than for all of us.\textsuperscript{57}

Whether or not she is a feminist, Shashi Deshpande has definitely carved a niche for herself in voicing the thoughts and feelings of the educated, urban middle-class woman. Though Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal have all ventured into this area of writing, none has pursued it with the single-mindedness and relentlessness of Deshpande. She has

"Never sworn allegiance to what we normally think of as feminist theories of the novel and yet or maybe because of the absence of this overt avowal, she has succeeded in providing her readers with a perspective which is simultaneously, truly individualistic and feminine."\textsuperscript{58}

She is basically interested in the issues, not just pertaining to women, but extended to all humanity. Despite her disapproval, she has been considered a ‘woman writer’, rather than a writer who deals with” human issues” which are “of interest to all humanity”. This has been made clear by Shashi Deshpande herself most recently in her article ‘Of Concern, of Anxieties’, where she says:

I have been put into the slot of woman writer, my writing; my writing has been categorized as ‘writing about women’ or ‘feminist’ writing. In this process, much in it has been missed. I have been denied the place and dignity of a writer who is dealing with issues that are human issues, of interest to all humanity (100).

From this it is clear that Shashi Deshpande is more humanist than a womanist or a feminist.
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[Signatures]